

Foregone Conclusion

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Summary: Nick and Judy are going to BunnyBurrow to meet Judy's parents. Nick is a little apprehensive about the whole thing. He may be a changed fox, but he's still a fox or that's how others seem to see him. Despite the fact that Judy assures him it'll be fine and that her parents are more progressive when it comes to foxes now. Nick still questions whether or not they will ever accept him

1. Chapter 1

Foregone Conclusion****

Nick felt his body jerk waking him from a deep sleep. He breathed in and tried to look around or at least he tried to. He turned his head and opened his eyes to his girlfriend's stomach. His head was in her lap and she was stroking his hair and ears atop his head. He heard her laugh. "Sleep well?"

He smiled. "Are we there yet?" he asked. She shook her head and looked out the window.

He didn't to try to sit up and just allowed himself to be petted by her. They were on the train from Zootopia to Bunny Burrow to visit Judy's family for a couple of weeks. Nick felt apprehensive about the whole meeting the family thing, but knew it was going to have to happen at some point. He was dating their daughter and hopefully for the long term as in life mates. He didn't have any immediate plans to propose this idea to her anytime soon, but he had been considering it for a couple of months now.

Every now and again he'll catch himself staring at her doing some mundane task such as paperwork for the ZPD or picking up around their apartment and think to himself how he wanted to be two bickering old biddies doing this until they were senile. He wanted to end his days with her like some cheesy romance novel. This is how he wanted his

life to go, but never thought he'd get the chance to. Now this life he only had dreamed of before seemed real enough he could obtain it. Once, he even caught himself looking at rings in a jewelry shop until the saleslady _requested_ he leave. He was starting to slip and give into this fantasy of his.

He had yet to talk to Judy about it, but he felt confident she felt the same—he hoped. To be honest, this all felt like a hope rather than a reality. He was still waiting for the other shoe to drop; for it all to go wrong and for him to be alone again. She'd find a bunny that she fancied more because that is who she _should_ marry and live her life with. It pained him to think about it, but he knew it wasn't an impossibility. He swallowed at the thought, the feeling of anxiety growing as he considered she may ultimately leave him as a result of her parent's wishes. Especially because he's a fox. He wasn't a fool. He knew exactly what he was despite how far he'd come: being a police officer for the ZPD and living his life quite respectably as of late.

"Hey, quit thinking so hard." Judy said looking down at him. She looked worried. Nick finally sat up and faced her on the seat of the train. "You'll break yourself and then what am I going to tell my parents?" she smiled trying to lighten the dampened mood he brought on with his thoughts.

He elected to ignore her by replying, "Sorry, Carrots, just tired. I feel like this is the first time I've slept since joining the force." He tried putting on a nonchalant demeanor. "A bunch of workhorses, these criminals. And the chief. Constant work." He yawned for good measure.

She rolled her eyes. "I know you're nervous, but it'll be fine. I told you that they're more progressive towards foxes. They even work with one now."

He looked at her, his jitters unrelieved, but his curiosity was increased by that statement. "There are foxes in Bunny Burrow?"

Judy nodded. "Yeah, the Greys. They were—aggressive in their demeanor, but their son Gideon turned out fine. He's a baker now and he's a business partner with my parents. He makes a mean blueberry pie." She playfully bumped his arm and smiled knowing that'd cheer him up.

Nick gave a half nod to her explanation. Granted, while Judy had opened his eyes to the fact that animals can change and he isn't just a sly, untrustworthy fox, he still has reservations about the whole trip. He heard the stories Judy told him about their discouraging her to be a cop and how traditional they were. He was just worried that despite their partnership with this Gideon Grey fellow, that they may not like their daughter dating a fox. Working with a fox and dating a fox was a whole other animal that they may not appreciate.

"You're doing it again." She poked his arm.

He shook his head and actually saw her instead of the thoughts going through his head. "Sorry, Carrots." He said. "You're right, I am nervous, but once I actually meet them and talk to them and we all sit down and eat carrots—I will be fine. But—until then—my stomach will feel like I have eaten a whole herd of

butterflies."

"Is it really called a 'herd of butterflies?" she laughed when he shrugged.

"I'll be with you every step of the way, dumb fox." She smiled trying to bring him comfort in familiarity.

Nick smiled. "Sly Bunny." Judy kissed his shoulder and put her arms around him. Nick pulled the bunny into a hug and held her.

"Soâ€¦you're parents know about me, Carrots?" he never thought to ask before. He just assumed that it had already been a discussion. Probably one that involved a lot of yelling, but they must be fine with it. He had been there when she asked if she could bring Nick along on her vacation home. They seemed receptive wanting to see the fox that "helped Judy make the world a better place." And it's not like they hadn't seen him in pictures with her when they were out doing stuff and sent them to her family.

Judy breathed into the scent of her fox. "Hmmmâ€¦yes. They do."

"Aboutâ€¦us?" he asked.

Judy let go of him and had an uncertain look on her faceâ€¦like she hadn't told her parents that they were dating and she didn't know how to tell Nick that. It made him very uncomfortable. "Carrotsâ€¦Judy?" he said questioningly.

"I may have been more implicate than explicate when referring to you as my partner. I mean it could mean many thingsâ€¦" she trailed off looking around.

Nick's jaw dropped. "What? Carrots, you mean they could think I'm just a coworkerâ€¦and nothing more?"

"Well, not nothing more. Why would anyone take just a coworker with them to visit their family?" she laughed nervously.

"So, they think we're just friends?" he asked. Agitation was starting to set in alongside a panic attackâ€¦well not a real one. He's had real panic and anxiety attacks before. This was different, but oddly no less stressful.

"Maybe?" she shrugged and gave a shy smile. Nick put his head in his hands.

"Oh, holy tapeworms." He said. Judy rubbed his back.

"Hey, it's going to be okay." She said reassuringly.

Nick looked up at her. "No, Carrots. It's not. They're going to hate me for dating their daughter, living with their daughter, sleeping with their daughterâ€¦this is serious. We can't just spring this on them."

"You're not giving them enough credit. I've seen them change. Just as you have." She smiled.

Nick couldn't argue with her there. His change was drastic. He said and did things he would never have dreamed of doing. If anyone had told him he would be a cop and madly in love with a bunny _and_ about to meet her parents. He would have laughed in their face and told them to play in traffic. But here he was, a police officer, sitting on a train to Bunny Burrow to meet his bunny girlfriend's family and. "Okay. But I still think we need to ease them as gently as possible into it." He said slowly.

She smiled. "Agreed. It will be fine. You'll see."

He certainly had that hope it would be fine and that he wouldn't get stomped on by that shoe he was scared of.

Her parents were not waiting for them at the train station. They had known that when they made the plans. Stu, Judy's father, had said they needed to finish something on the farm. Nick hadn't been paying much attention when Judy was discussing travel plans with her family. Nick didn't think one way or another about it until he found out on the train that Judy's parents didn't know he was meeting them as "the boyfriend." Now he also wished he had bought a suit or at least wore something nicer to meet them the first day. He pretty much looked like a homeless man in his light green Hawaiian shirt, tan khakis and mismatched tie. Nothing about him said that he was acceptable enough to be a candidate for a son-in-law let alone the boyfriend of their daughter. The anxiety was setting in. It would fester until he actually talk to them and just let things happenâ€|hopefully good things. He had to make them good thingsâ€|.

He felt himself beginning to become flustered and upset again. He was kind of happy that he'd have a few more moments of peace with Judy because taking the plunge into the unknownâ€|he was lying. No matter what Judy said, he did _know_ how they'd react to him. He was trying to suddenly grow back that thick skin he use to have. He mentally reprimanded himself for becoming too soft. It was easy now to let his guard down with Judy. She put him in a place where he was comfortable in his own fur, but that was to his detriment when it came to this situation. It had become easier to shrug off strangers comments.

To be fair, when the saleslady asked him to leave he wasn't that bothered. He had no intentions of buying a ring that day anyway. Before Judy, he wouldn't have been deeply offended and hurt by it, simply knowing she asked him to leave because he was a fox. Now, despite that he still struggled with his low self-esteem, he was in a better place about what he was. Especially with his actual job as an officer at the ZPD. However, he knew that he was going to be hurt simply because he wanted so bad to be accepted by her parents. He wanted to make a good impression and for them to think that he was good enough for their daughter. He wanted to love them and he wanted them to love _him_.

He just didn't see that happening. He felt Judy slip her hand over his before taking it. He looked down at her smiling face. She brought up their joined hands and said, "I'm right beside you, Nick. I love you."

Those words. The words that made him cry himself to sleep the first night she said it to him. They had been at his apartment watching a TV show together. She was still living in that shoe box when she

first moved to Zootopia. She said it to him when they were saying good night. She looked timid, afraid of how he would react. He did so by picking her up and kissing her as passionately as he knew how. She left that night because she said she needed a good night sleep before work the next day. He was left alone in his apartment feeling overwhelmed by those three words. He honestly couldn't remember hearing them since his mother told him she loved him when he was a child. All he could do was go to bed and try to get to sleep himself, but his emotions consumed him and he cried harder than he had in years. He hadn't realized how lonely he had been up to that point.

Now, he felt overwhelmed by those words again. "I love you too, Carrots." He said. It was in moments like these that he thought he could be old and senile with her and that no one could take her away from him. Not another bunny nor her parents. "Well, let's get going. Don't want them to think we got lost." He joked.

She gave a small laugh simply reacting to his comment. They picked up their suitcases and walked hand in hand to her parent's house.

Judy didn't even pause when she saw her parent's house. She walked right up to the door and let herself in. Nick hesitated slightly, but more to see the house. It looked like one of the country houses you saw in old movies and paintings. The house was huge. "Well, I guess it has to be to hold that many kids." He thought to himself.

Nick wasn't surprised by it, but he did take it in as being odd at how accurate these places were portrayed in the media. He breathed in the country air trying to figure out what these country people talk about in their songs. It was too open. Almost like not having a specific kind of smell at all, but that made it distinct from the air he breathed in Zootopia. He looked around at the wide view of open spaces for miles only obstructed by the occasional barn or house and farming machines in the distant. The telltale signs that it was almost time to start planting produce. He didn't see anyone else out here. It was dead quiet and felt quite empty. He wasn't sure he could stay in a place like this for too long by himself. He'd give himself the spooks.

"Nick, you coming?" Judy's head poked through the door. He was now vaguely aware of the loud shouts of affection and contentment of home.

"Yes, just looking around." He said.

"I'll take you on a walk tomorrow when it's not almost dark out." She said smiling. Nick nodded and picked up his suitcase and walked up the steps to the porch and into her family home. A sudden silence fell upon the crowd of bunnies all shapes, sizes, age and gender. He looked around. He was sure the shock on his face matched theirs. Little by little the bunnies eventually scattered all throughout the encounter that would proceed in a few moments.

Nick's eyes settle on two distinctly older bunnies, he assumed was Judy's parents. He immediately smiled, setting down his luggage and proceeded to walk over towards them in a friendly, but circumspect manner. He extended his hand out and shook the mother's first. "Hello," He smiled.

The female bunny took his hand softly and Nick made sure his grip wasn't seemingly hostile. "Hello." She replied. "I'm Bonnie, Judy's mother."

He considered making a joke about thinking they were sisters, but thought that to be too cliché and discourteous. "It's a pleasure to meet you."

He turned to the older male bunny and equally extended his hand in an amicable demeanor. The male bunny did have a stronger shake of hand than Bonnie and Nick slightly expected that and met him with as much force as he thought respectful. "I'm Stu." He said gruffly. His voice wasn't probably that deep, but he was obviously trying to put up a tougher front than he probably normally had. The only thing they all three seemed to have in common at the moment was how they approached the situation with caution.

"Mom. Dad. This is my boyfriend, Nick Wilde." He heard Judy's voice say diagonal of him. He felt Stu's hand tense in his. A sudden death grip took place of what would have been two men simply testing the other's strength in physical arms through a little friendly hand shake. Nick's face must have said it all because Stu finally let go staring at the fox. Both parents briefly looked at each other as Nick stepped back, feeling like he was awaiting judgement.

"What?" Stu's voice shook slightly as he took a good long look at his daughter. Nick knew that look. It was the look that Judy had on her face when she knew that a perpetrator or someone in general they were trying to talk to was going to be difficult, but valuable to the case. Nick marginally panicked and considered telling Judy to relax a little, but thought better of it when thought of how that might come across. Besides, they raised her. They probably knew that look too.

With a determined look she repeated, "This is Nick Wilde. He's my boyfriend."

"I thought you said he was your partner." Bonnie said.

"I am." Nick said. He was going to try to include himself in this conversation, but keep a reasonable distance so they don't think that Judy and he planned a surprise attack on them. They should have thought this one out better. Perhaps if they had ease them into this, then they would have had time to think about Nick dating Judy instead of having to deal with the shock right as they saw him for the first time.

"On the police force?" she added slowly looking up and down Nick. He saw the pained expression that spread across the bunny's face. He inwardly cringed, knowing he should feel guilty that they just sprung this on the poor couple, but also felt jaded enough to know that her agonized look was there solely because of his species.

"I'm her partner at work too." He said. He smiled as friendly as possible, trying extremely hard to seem like he didn't realize how tense and awkward the situation had become. "I'm both."

"A fox?" Stu said in disbelief. He looked at his daughter and then to her boyfriend.

"Yes, dad. A fox. Nick is a fox." Judy said with exasperation. She swung her arms up in an exaggerated manner.

"Judy." Nick said quietly. He wanted to stop the fight he saw coming. All three bunnies turned to look at him. He said her name, but was left unsure of how to proceed from there. He didn't want to be as blunt as he most likely should be. He didn't want to cause any trouble and he didn't want Judy to fight with her parents over him. He knew it was going to happen, but now that it was staring him in the face he was wishing for that recent progressiveness that Judy praised in her parents. He hated this feeling. He was dancing around being truly hurt and offended by their brashness and wanting to play peace maker and try his hardest to make this work. Nick looked at Judy trying to figure out something to prevent an argument. If he wanted this relationship to have half a chance, peacemaker it was.

"How can you date a fox?" he asked with clear disgust. Stu was making sure everyone knew how he felt about the situation regardless of how it came across. He didn't care that Nick was standing in the same room.

"What do you mean, 'how can you date a fox?' she asked rolling her eyes. "Just like you and mom. How you guys dated."

"That was different." Stu started.

"How so?" Judy interrupted him. Nick looked at them helplessly, unsure of what to do, if he could do anything. Time was moving faster than normal. He was sure of it.

"He's a Fox." Stu tried to talk, but was soon interrupted again by his daughter.

"So you've said." She snapped.

"Judyâ€¦" Nick said beseechingly. This could still be fixed. He could fix this. Soâ€¦he's a foxâ€¦nothing bad was said yetâ€¦

"You will not see him anymore." Stu said. "This isn't a discussion."

"Mr. Hopps," Nick spoke up. Suddenly, he found himself wanting to argue with Judy's father. He needed to be smart about it though. He desperately didn't want to lose Judy, but they were still her parents no matter how much he hoped she'd choose him. "I can assure you thatâ€¦"

"I'm not talking to you, Mr. Wilde." Stu looked at him contemptuously. "Except to say one thing. You will not be seeing my daughter. You're not welcome in my house and you need to get off my property."

Wellâ€¦there went that out the window. Nick couldn't see a way out of this one.

"Dad!" Judy addressed her father astounded. "You can't just kick him out of the house."

"This is my house and I want him to leave!" Stu's voice raised

slightly for the first time.

Judy breathed in. "Fine. Nick, get your things. We're going." Nick looked at Judy. He wished he could ask her to repeat herself. Did she say she was going with him?

"Judy," Bonnie spoke up. "You just got here."

"It's clear we're not welcomed here." She said with hostility.

"You're welcome here, Jude." Stu said. "But he's not. He has to go."

"Because of what he is?" she asked, already knowing the answer. "You work with Gideon and you can't say that's different."

"We know Gideon and have since he was a child." Stu said. "We saw him grow into a better person andâ€¦"

"Nick is already a good person." Judy said. Nick was glad that they didn't seem to know his background. He thinks it would have been used earlier as evidence of why he should leave beyond that he clearly wasn't wanted. "He's not a bad guy. He's not one of those foxes I grew up hearing about, that we all grew up hearing about. He's sweet, thoughtful, loving, forgiving, and so much more than any bunny I've ever dated."

Nick looked at her describe him. He was fairly certain he was less than all of those pleasant and flattering things she called him. He could make counter arguments to all the things she said. However, he finally had an argument to smooth the situation over. She wasn't going to just leave himâ€¦least he hoped, but now maybe he can fix the relationship with her parents. Maybe if they had timeâ€¦they can come to an understanding, "Judy, I can go. You stay here and visit your family. I'm sure Finnick has someâ€¦activity he could use help with."

He made his voice sound light. It was his "conman" voice he used when trying to persuade others. Unfortunately, like he knows certain demeanors of Judy of when she is about to do something, she can also recognize the way he conducts himself as well. She glared at him. She wasn't having it.

"No." she said. "You go, I go." She looked at him. She picked up his suitcase as well as hers. "You said Gideon is a better animal than when he was younger, well so am I." she looked at her parents.

"He's a fox! It is in their biology to be untrustworthy, manipulative, deceitful, violent, mindlessâ€¦!" Stu shouted. Now Carrot's speech made more sense. Nick had gotten over the fact that Judy publically announced her views on the behavior of predators. She did so ignorantly and irresponsibly as she said so herself. However, he also knew she no longer held those views, but it was different hearing it said in such a hateful, angry manner. Nick gaped at Stu unintentionally. He suddenly was feeling sick and like he couldn't breathe.

"Shut up!" Judy shouted back. "You will not talk about him that way. Nick isn't any of those things!" Again, he was grateful for their

lack of knowledge of his conman days. Except for the violence and the mindlessness. He never sought to use violence as a means to an end and he had to be smart to make the con work. He was also smart enough to know when to cut his losses. Nick wanted this thing to work out with her family, but also knew when he wasn't wanted. He was about to ask Judy if they could just please go.

Stu looked like he was trying to figure out another strategy. He clearly didn't want Judy to leave, but didn't want Nick in the house. He lowered his voice, "We always told you that when you date someone there is a possibility of becoming their life mate. Can you marry him? How can you have kids with him? If you did how would those kids feel having a fox as a father?"

"I've never cared about what others thought of me." She said. "I'm not going to start now. If we got married and decided to _adopt_ kids. They have two loving parents that'd teach them the same. To not care what others thought of them and to not settle or be complacent or any of those things." The bunny's voice was starting to rise with each word.

Nick had never seen this side of Judy. This was clearly coming from some place deeper than her parents not liking her boyfriend. "They'd have dreams and be encouraged to achieve those dreams. Come on, Nick. Let's go."

Judy didn't see, but Nick nodded and started to follow her. "Yes, Ma'am." His voice quiet and a lot meeker than he ever thought it could be. Judy wasn't in a place that he could talk her into letting him go home and letting her visit her family and he really didn't have it in him anymore to try to. He was too busy trying to not feel as nauseous as he was in that moment. Maybe that fresh air

"No, wait!" Bonnie said. The three animals looked at her. She laughed nervously. "We can put Nick in Daniel's old bedroom."

Daniel was one of Judy's brothers. He had gotten married and went to take care of his father in law's farm. Nick wondered how he remembered that. He didn't go to the wedding with Judy maybe the weekend away from her is what made him remember. His mind was beginning to wander, distracting him from the ill feeling he had in his stomach.

Stu looked at his wife. There was a silent conversation going on between the two. "Fine."

Judy looked over at Nick. She already had set down a suitcase ready to open the front door.

"That's a solution." Nick said. Maybe he can make this work after all. If they spent time with him maybe they can see he changed as well as a result of Judy for the better. Maybe he could make them see he was a decent guy. The feeling of needing to vomit lingered, but Nick was still in the middle of just wanting to leave and still wanting to play peacemaker. He was just so confused. His feelings and thoughts were everywhere. He couldn't think. He wanted to run from here as fast as he could and he wanted stay and work this out. This had to work out. "Judy Carrots? What do you say?" His voice didn't have the usually pep to it.

She sighed looking at her parents and her boyfriend. "I thought you were supposed to be on my side." She grumbled.

Nick felt his heart sink. He was just trying to make this family thing work. This time a real panic attack was coming on. He should have just left with her, but he heard himself say, "Weâ€¦came all this way to see them." He was trying to keep his voice steady. She looked up at him. Her facial expression changed from sadness to worry when she noticed his body language.

"Then it's settled." Bonnie rushed over to take the luggage from her daughter. "Nick," she turned to look at the fox. She had a concerned expression on her face when she noticed how he was standing like he could collapse any minute. "I'll take you to Daniel's old room and Judy, you know where your room is. Stu, is that reasonable?"

Nick, Judy and Bonnie all looked at Stu, who looked ready to explode. "As reasonable as this can get." He growled. Nick had been afraid of Judy, more so because he didn't want to go to jail for tax evasion, but this was downright terrifying. He never knew a bunny could look soâ€¦scary. "We're not done talking about this." He said looking at Judy. He turned sharply to Nick. He looked up and down the fox. "You will never be a part of this family."

Judy looked ready to pick up the fight where it left off, but Stu cut her off this time. He walked toward the door and before he left the house he said he needed to check on something.

"I'm sorry." Judy said after her father slammed the door.

"Oh, don't worry aboutâ€¦" Bonnie started talking.

"Nick, I should have known better. You did." She said quietly. Bonnie looked at her daughter then back to Nick. Judy took her bag from her mother's hand and walked off leaving Nick alone with Bonnie.

Bonnie silently watched her daughter leave. Nick never once looked up. He didn't remember when he started to stare at the floor. The print on it was green with carrots. He felt dizzy. "Nick." He jumped when he heard Judy's mother say his name. She looked just as startled by his reaction.

"Yes, ma'am." He said.

"You okay?" she asked.

If Nick was not suffering a panic attack, he would have scoffed. "Yes. I'm just a little tired." He said. He was simply confused and left empty by this whole encounter.

2. Chapter 2

Nick followed Mrs. Hopps down a hall on the same floor. The walk was silent until Mrs. Hopps stopped at a room and opened the door. She stepped aside to allow Nick to go into the room. He took his suitcase from her giving a weak smile.

"Thank you." His voice was tighter than normal, but he was banking on her not knowing him well enough to catch it. Now that the official

fight he knew would happen was over he was trying to gain back some of that confident demeanor he usually wore. His nerves were still very much on edge, but he was afraid of what would happen if he allowed himself to lose control again like he did during the fight. He near fainted and vomited all at once. Judy and her family are not stupid. They could probably tell he wasn't doing well. Regardless, he smiled casually like he does; putting his hands into his pockets after setting his suitcase down.

"You're welcome." She said. Nick heard her voice was just as tight as his, but it was the word "welcome" that caught his eye. His ears went flat on his head.

"Look, Mrs. Hopps," He started. He took out his hands from his pocket and put them up in a surrendering manner. She looked up at him. "I want to apologize for earlier. I don't mean to cause you and your husband trouble."

Mrs. Hopps looked down with a soft smile. "I'll admit I'm in shock." She said. "Judy never said anything about dating anyone. Let alone you." She shrugged. "I figured you were close to her. She did seem to talk about you an awful lot and spend a lot of time with you."

After a few moments of silence. "You feel you should have seen it coming?" Nick asked. He was still trying to proceed with caution. He wasn't sure why she was telling him this.

"No." She shook her head. "Judy should have told me." Mrs. Hopps looked straight into his eyes. Nick suddenly felt uncomfortable again. "How long?"

Nick slowly nodded. "That we've known each other or been officially dating?" he asked avoiding the question. He really wished they had discussed this and told the Hopps sooner.

"Both." She said simply. If Nick wasn't still trying to conduct himself with caution, he would have smirked. He sees where Judy gets her determination.

"Before dating nine or ten-ish months and after dating five maybe six months. We kind of danced around each other for a month or so before we actually committed to it. I'd say six personally." Nick smiled remembering their first month as a couple. They were very prudent in every action they took, every word spoken leading up to that first kiss. It was beautiful. She was beautiful is beautiful.

"You knew before she did that you were officially dating?" she said with a small smile.

Nick noticed the fondness behind the question. He smiled himself, still timid, but it was enough for his nervousness to kind of calm down. He was too agitated to actually feel calm. There was still the unknown of tomorrow and how this vacation will proceed from this night on. "Well, I was kind if under the impression with the candle light dinners and when she bought me roses."

Mrs. Hopps actually laughed, looking down. Her smile widened. "That sounds like my Judy." She looked back up. "I want to apologize too. For all we hear about you from Judy, you seem like a good man. I'll

admit I'm a littleâ€¦uncertain about how I feel about the relationship, but I am willing to see where it goes."

Nick stared at her in amazement. Despite the fact that Mrs. Hopps didn't say much during the fight earlier he wasn't expecting that. "Thank you." He breathed. He sat on the bed feeling like he had the breath knocked out of him. He was overwhelmed with the emotions that he had been battling all day. Granted, he wasn't out of the woods yet, but he at least had Mrs. Hopps as a willing audience.

Mrs. Hopps rushed over to him. "Nick, are you okay?" she asked with concern. He looked up at her. She had her hand extended out to him, but wasn't quite meaning to touch him either. Judging by her face, he must have looked awful.

"I'll be fine." He said trying to sound reassuring. "I think I'm just suffering a panic attack. It started earlierâ€¦I'll be fine." He closed his eyes trying to take deep breaths.

"I'll be right back." Mrs. Hopps said with concern.

Nick nodded. He was finally aloneâ€¦he was trying to remember his exercises to reduce the severity of the attacks. For what he felt like he was experiencing he actually felt like this was mild. He was able to walk and converseâ€¦unlike other times. In all reality, he just felt emotionally drained. He couldn't believe he talked himself and Judy into staying. Least her parents couldn't say they didn't try.

They could still be angry that he and Judy were dating, but never say they didn't want it to work out with the parents. As much as Nick wanted it toâ€¦he wasn't sure if it could work out. He saw that Mrs. Hopps seem to want to make it work tooâ€¦if only for Judy's sake if nothing else. Mr. Hoppsâ€¦it'd take a miracle for him to come around. Nick cursed himself. He was still dwelling on the situation rather than trying to get rid of this panic attackâ€¦it just wouldn't leave. He was certain he'd have a nervous breakdown if this persisted. He desperately wanted to avoid that.

He looked up when he heard a soft knock on the door. A young bunny stood at the open door. She looked to be a little older if not the same age as Judy. Her fur had a brownish tint with gray speckles. The first thing that Nick noticed was how vibrant her brown eyes were. They were bright unlike the usual shade of brown one typically saw. "Nick?" she addressed him. "May I come in? I'm Abigale." Her voice was confident, but soothing.

"Sure." Nick said. He watched as the young bunny then approached him without discretion. She reached out her hand to him. He looked down at the hand before deciding he oblige her. He extended his hand out to hers. She grabbed his wrist and immediately checking his pulse. "What are you doing?" he started to pull back. The abrupt way she grabbed him made him jump. He was already on edge and that didn't help.

Abigale's gripped tightened on his wrist. "Checking your pulse. Mom said you think you're suffering from a panic attack. I want to see how serious it is."

"I said I was fine." Nick protested. After a moment she let

go.

"Yes, you are." She agreed. She body checked him. "In more ways than one. I'm just messing with you. Calm down, fox." Nick started to get up, when the bunny gently pushed him back down on the bed.

Nick put his hands up in submission. "I'm sorry. A lot has happened today. Let's start over. I'm Nick." He held his hand out to shake hers. He was surprised by her physical and verbal brashness.

Abigale smirked and took his hand and shook it. She had enough vigor as her father. "As I have said. I'm Abigale. I'm Judy's older sister. The nurse in the family. I also studied psychology."

If she was a nurse and also studied psychology, then she should know she's taking the wrong approach in helping someone who is having a panic attack—in general anyway. Granted, Nick only sometimes needed actual coddling. Not that he liked to admit it.

She laughed as she looked down at the fox. "I'm sorry for staring, but I am just amazed that she'd bring home a fox of all things."

"Because of the Gideon Grey incident?" he asked. Judy had told him about it on the walk to her parents. She wanted him to know in case there was an awkwardness when they met and so Nick didn't get upset if he found out later from someone else. Gideon comes by the farm a few days a week to conduct business with Mr. and Mrs. Hopps.

"No. Not because of that." She said. "Let me rephrase this. I didn't know she was going to bring home a fox that was her boyfriend of all things. I seriously thought she was going to die an old spinster." She laughed. She sat on the bed next to him.

Suddenly she was very professional. She looked at his eyes. "Your eyes look fine. How do they feel? Are you experiencing blurred vision? Discomfort or pain? Light sensitivity?"

"It's honestly not that severe." Nick said looking away. He rubbed the back of his neck "I've had worse. This is mild."

"How long has this been going on today?" she asked. Nick wished she'd go back to her unprofessional manner. He didn't want to be interrogated. He was embarrassed enough as it is.

"It started this morning on the train. I just felt generally nervous about meeting Judy's family." Nick said. "I went through the motions of alternating with worry and trying to distract myself so I'd calm down."

She nodded. "The fight must not have helped." She said it more to herself. He watched as she continued to look him over. She didn't touch him anymore, but she was still trying to see any signs that his panic attack was more serious than he said.

Nick didn't know what to say. He didn't want to discuss this with anyone. He just wanted this to go away. "Nick, you're going away again." His thoughts were interrupted by Abigale's voice. "While, I agree with you that it is not severe. You are trying to distract yourself again."

"I'm sorry. Like I said. A lot has happened today." He said. Nick rubbed his eyes and moved to his temples.

"I'm going to level with you." She said. Nick could still feel her scrutinizing him despite the fact that his eyes were closed. "You are not wanted here. By many of us living in this house."

He stopped and looked at her.

She continued when she saw she had his attention. "It's a sad reality that we find ourselves in. However, as I am sure you know, Judy has a way with getting people to change their minds. I'm sure she chose you because you have a similar talentâ€|no offense."

Nick looked at her and smiled at her remark on his species. He had the feeling though it was intentional, it was not malicious. Her tone was too light and demeanor too friendly. Her disposition constantly changing between serious and bluntly insensitive was starting to become tolerable. "None taken."

She smiled. "I was encouraged to become a nurse because we live out in the middle of nowhere and it'd be useful to the family. My husband lives here with me. It was what was best for the family. He left his home because his family could afford to lose him. He didn't have a particular skill that made him valuable, I use the term loosely, enough to have to stay with the family farm. That fell upon his siblings. We are very family oriented. It's how we bunnies live. Judy is an exception to us here. We're slowly learning to live in her world. My mother is a little quicker to respond to that than my father. I'm pretty sure she likes you regardless of what she says. She just needs time to understand why Judy chose you. Though, I suspect on some level she'd have to do that with anyone Judy chose. Even a fellow bunny. As you know. Judy is just special."

Nick nodded. "Judy is an extraordinary bunny. I don't deserve her." He confided. He knew it. He wasn't a fool. He was lucky to have her any way she wanted him.

Abigale looked up and down him again. "I believe that you probably deserve each other. You chose her as much as she chose you. I just don't know you well enough to know why. But, don't sell yourself short. Least not around here anyway." She cracked another species joke. Nick thinks he has a favorite amongst Judy's siblings. Her brazen behavior was starting to freak him out less. Now he was starting to enjoy it.

Nick laughed.

"As for my father. He was totally blind sided where I think mom put two and two together more quickly. I mean during the fight. The whole house heard. Judy does talk about you a lot, but I don't think either one of them considered before that you had potential to become Judy's boyfriend." She said.

"Do you thinkâ€|?" Nick started to ask.

"That he'll change his mind and accept you?" she finished his question. "Truth? I don't know. He may or may not. I'm sorry."

"No. I'd rather hear it so I can come to terms with it in the long run if his acceptance never comes to pass." Nick said.

Abigale nodded. "Hang in there." She said putting her hand on his shoulder. "He'll have plenty of years to get his head out of the manure pile."

Nick laughed and cringed at the mental image at the same time. "Thank you." He smiled at Abigale. "It feels like you were the only one to take time to talk to me personally about this situation this whole trip."

"Why, did Judy not warn you that this could happen?" she asked. She had a baffled expression before her face going stone cold. "She seriously didn't warn you."

Nick noticed how she wasn't asking a question. Nick shook his head. "I kind of found out today on the train that they didn't even know I was her boyfriend."

"Unbelievable. Her optimism is relentless. That's when the panic attack started, didn't it?" she asked.

"Yesâ€¦I felt general anxiety before, but then I flipped my lid when she said that they didn't know." Nick said.

"Are you generally susceptible to panic attacks?" she asked.

Nick breathed in begrudgingly. "Yes. I am, unfortunately. Just something I've had to deal with for a long timeâ€¦it has to do withâ€¦stressâ€¦" he really didn't want to admit to her that it was because he was a fox and how society has treated him his whole life because of it. "Stress related toâ€¦"

"I get it." She spared him. Nick saw a hint of pity in her eyes. He hated it. Not that she had enough compassion to feel pity for him, but for the reason she did pity him.

"Does Judy know?" she asked.

"About the panic attacks? Yes, she does." He said. "She helped me through one once. That one was kind of bad. So, she's seen me with a bad one. We've talked about it."

"And yet she didn't think to warn you or to tell mom and dad long before this that she and you are dating." Abigale sounded annoyed. "I'd apologize, but I think Judy is the one that needs to apologize to you for all this."

Nick gave a weak laugh. "I do think I should probably talk to her." He said quietly.

The bunny shook her head before saying, "How are you feeling?" she asked.

"A lot better than before." Nick said.

Abigale nodded. "Good. Alrightâ€¦I think I'm ready to go to bed now." Abigale said hoisting herself off the bed using Nick's body to steady herself to a standing position. "Good night, Nick." She smiled

patting Nick's shoulder. Nick suddenly realized he did feel a whole lot calmer. He no longer felt like he was going to both throw up and pass out anymore. In fact, he felt normal again.

"You said you went to nursing school because it was useful." Nick stopped her. "Why psychology?"

She turned back to look at him. "Because I like it. It's for me."

Nick smiled. This was definitely his favorite one of Judy's siblings. Abigale left closing the door leaving him by himself for the first time in a long time. He spent so much time with Judy that now it felt odd to be in a bedroom by himself. He wondered if he could even sleep by himself anymore. He had gotten so used to her body next to his.

Nick laid back letting his legs dangle off the bed. He took a few steady breaths. Just talking to Abigale really calmed him down. He was still uncertain about the next week and half ahead, but maybe he could get through it. He started to feel a little confident that this could work again. Maybe.

Next Morning:

Nick was jerked awake by a body jumping on top of his. At some point in the night he had rolled himself into the blanket like he was a burrito. He made a grumbling noise trying to figure out where he was. He came to the realization that Judy was lying on top of him. She didn't say anything, but he could hear her breathing. She squeezed him. "Morning." She said.

"Good morning." He replied. He tried to move, but she held him in place.

"I'm so sorry, Nick." She said. "You're right. We should have eased them into it. We should have told them long before we came here, please forgive me."

Nick went immediately into trying to reassure her that everything was going to be okay, but she stopped him. "Abby told me about the panic attack. I didn't realize you were that bad off." He assumed Abby was Abigale.

"Everything kind of happened really fast, Carrots." He said. He rolled over, and she sat up looking down at him.

"It doesn't change the fact that I should have taken better care of you." She said. She rubbed his arm with a frown.

"And we agreed I'd tell you when I knew I was getting bad." He said.

The first time he had a panic attack in front of her it was right after a particularly hard kidnapping case. Needless to say, muzzles were involved and Nick found himself in the middle of it. It took Judy four hours to calm him down after he had gotten the muzzle off when she untied him. The couple had a long talk about his history with them. They agreed that Nick would inform her when he was getting bad and they'd work it out. Granted, he hadn't had a panic attack

since that case, but it was out in the open that he was susceptible to them when particular things got overwhelming.

It made Nick feel awful. He hated feeling like he was burdening someone. He was a burden. When he was a conman he was better at hiding his emotions and very rarely had the attacks. He'd go nearly a year before something set him off that bad. It was just the environment of the job and the type of animals he had to interact with. Emotions rarely played a factor in what they were doing. It was a con. They were acting anyway and most of the time their species didn't seem to play part in selling pawpsicles or the other stuff they did. It was all very upfront. They knew what to do, where to go, who to sell to and who to con and how to act based on the perception of their species. But for the most part, it didn't seem to come up directly in the con beyond the usual "clever" quip or remark they'd get every once in a while.

Finnick and Nick worked well together and did so because they had known each other for years. They knew how to act, react and interact with each other. They never brought up emotional stuff. It just wasn't done. It's not that they didn't care. It was more of "I'm not going to ask but if you tell I'll listen. They would listen they just not preferred to tell or talk about it at all. They respected that so long as it didn't detract from the con.

Being with Judy was very different in that regard. He tried putting up a front and posturing when things were going bad. She saw right through it and called it out. She wasn't going to pretend like Finnick and he would. Finnick knew about the panic attacks. He had witnessed it once and acted with as much care as Judy had, but again they just didn't bring it up. They never discussed it since it happened. Every once in a while Finnick looked like he was checking up on Nick, but never directly said anything. Nick never directly told him anything either. Finnick was smart. He most likely put two and two together as to why the attacks happened.

"I didn't want to seem like I was just assuming that your parents would have a problem with me simply because I'm a fox. That I was being prejudice against them." He said. "What if I was wrong...there was that chance. I knew you were really hoping that it wouldn't matter that I'm a fox. I was hoping myself I was trying to keep it from you because I didn't want to"

"Come across as specicist?" she offered.

"Yes. It was stupid of me." He said. "I should have told you when I saw the attack coming."

"You did tell me, Nick." She said. "I should have listened better. You were really upset that I had not told them on the train. I was just so sure that they would accept you because of Gideon. You and I both were in the wrong. I was more in the wrong for not going about our relationship the right way when it came to meeting my parents. I am so sorry, Nick."

"It'll be fine, Carrots." He said. He took her hands in his. He put them to his lips and kissed them. "I want this to work out. I really do."

She sighed at his affection. "So, do I." she said. She leaned down

closer to his face. Their noses barely touching. "Just tell me next time no matter what is going on. Let me take care of you." She whispered the last part before chastely kissing his lips.

He kissed her back closing his eyes. He loved the feeling of her body on his in her pajamas. They were just thin enough that he could practically feel her soft fur—or maybe it was just his memory of her naked body against his making him feel it, regardless—he loved it. His stomach flip flopped at the sensation of their lips together, their chests pressed against each other. He parted his lips when the door opened. Judy jerked up and Nick froze in place. "Oh—" Nick almost groaned when he heard that voice.

"I-I just wanted you two to know that breakfast is almost ready." Mrs. Hopps said.

She looked away from a shirtless Nick—lying in bed with her daughter on top of him. That was not how this day should have started. Nick was sure that it would not help their argument. Judy put the blanket on top of Nick, covering him entirely. He was partially grateful because he was sure he was blushing like mad. He put his hands over his face despite already being covered.

"Thank you, mom." Judy said cheerfully. "We'll be there in a few."

Nick heard the door shut. Judy pulled back the covers laughing softly. She pulled his hands off of his face by his wrists. "That was bad—" he whispered.

Judy wiggled her head from side to side. "It could have been worse." She smiled. "Come on, Nick. She saw that we're affectionate. We weren't doing anything to disrespect my parents' house."

Nick nodded. "Okay. Well—let's show them how respectful we can be." He sat up, but didn't want to get out of bed just yet. Knowing his luck, he'd get out of bed as naked as can be and Abigale would walk in and see them together while he was like that.

"Respectful up to a point." She corrected him.

"Did they really let you get away with that growing up?" he asked. Judy hopped off the bed. She turned around to look back at him smirking.

"Up to a point." She answered.

Nick rolled his eyes. "Okay. Let me get dressed and I'll meet you—"

"In the dining room. Don't be too long. I'll be lonely without you." she said teasingly. She shut the door behind her.

Nick took in a deep morning breather. Today—other than Mrs. Hopps walking in on them about to make out—was going to be a good day. He was going to make a good—second impression—okay. He shouldn't get his hopes up—but that is not what Judy would want. Today was going to be a good day. He was going to make a good impression and hopefully get both Mrs. Hopps and—Mr. Hopps to open up to him. He just has to turn on the charm. He may have to tone down the conman

demeanor when turning on the charmâ€|but that was sometimes a part of the con. He had to tailor it to his audience. Granted, he wanted to show them he really was a good guy, but they may need a little coaxing into seeing that he was a good guy. Think positive.

Nick made the bed and put the suitcase on top. He opened it up trying to decide what to wear. Granted all of his clothes looked the same. All various types of Hawaiian shirts and tan khaki pants. The only thing he really never changed was his tie. Judy teased him about it one day telling him she'd buy him a whole bunch of new ties to match his shirts. He feigned insult saying that it was sacrilege. She stopped teasing him so much about it when he said it was his father's tieâ€|or it looked like one he had when he was a child. She did end up getting a couple of different ties, but looked similar. He wasn't sure if she did that because of his look-like-father's tie and felt guilty about what she said or if she was just testing to see if he'd even wear them.

He took out a blue Hawaiian shirt and one of the ties that kind of matched that Judy got him. He tried to get dressed a little faster. He realized that he was thinking of these things because he was stalling. He just needed to rip off the Band-Aid and get out there with his girlfriend. It was just breakfastâ€|the most important meal of the dayâ€|and he managed to open the door. Think positive.

End
file.